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ABSTRACT

Two assignments used in a commercial French course are modeled after case studies often required in business courses. They serve three functions for commercial French students: (1) to increase awareness of foreign investments and business in the United States as well as American business activities abroad, (2) to give students valuable experience in locating information on international corporations, and (3) to expose students to basic business practices. In both assignments students are required to use reference works available in the business section of most libraries. The first assignment, designed to familiarize students with the library's business section and its resources, is to list five French corporations in the same industry in the United States and five American companies in the same industry with operations, subsidiaries, or branches in France, together with information about their addresses and products. The second assignment is to find as much information as possible on a single corporation doing business in France, or a French company doing business in the United States, in any industry. The practical information gained from these assignments has been found to be an asset for non-business majors who are the majority of commercial language students. The resources used by the students contain information not only on the companies but also on aspects of the industry and its trade and on current policies and developments. (MSE)

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The Business Alcove: Library Resources for Students of Commercial French

Commercial foreign language courses are designed to prepare students to function in a business setting in a foreign country. Typically, students learn the theoretical concepts of the economy, commerce, and principles of business in the country. They also study practical material such as the vocabulary of office procedures, the rules of commercial correspondence, and the processes of banking, sales, insurance, and other specialized areas. Since achieving depth of knowledge as well as fluency in all of these areas may be unrealistic in a one or two semester course, the practical dimension should be emphasized so that students may develop their business skills. One particularly valuable skill is the ability to locate information on international commerce, including such data on individual corporations as their types of industries, products, subsidiaries, and backgrounds. This skill can be developed in a junior level business French course modeled on the following example.

In recent years the foreign language education profession has been doing much to encourage the teaching of commercial foreign languages and has defended it as a viable and practical alternative to traditional language courses. This trend was stimulated by the report in 1979 of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies which joined several other reports and articles in deploring the lack of foreign language competence among

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Americans.[1] This lack of fluency in the languages and knowledge of the customs of other countries is especially disadvantageous for individuals involved in foreign trade. Not only are few Americans competent in foreign languages, but many are even unaware of the extent of foreign investment and trade and its importance to the U.S. economy. In 1981 a Roper poll showed that forty-nine percent of those surveyed believed that "foreign trade was either irrelevant or harmful to the economy of the United States."[2] The development of courses in applied areas such as commercial language is in part a response to this situation. During this period in which college students seek professional training, the study of business languages can "increase the career relevance of foreign language study."[3] Fluency in the language and knowledge of business procedures in other countries are more crucial than ever and are assets to any individual seeking a career in international commerce.

As they teach the vocabulary, systems, and principles of foreign business, language teachers have been looking to American multinational corporations for support as well as clients. Foreign language abilities are, however, regarded by business corporations as tools for the conduct of their business and not as a substitute for commercial skills and knowledge. In his 1980 article entitled "Foreign Languages, International Studies and Business (A Dubious Savior)" Samuel L. Hayden states: "From the corporate viewpoint, foreign languages and international studies expertise is a tool requiring a relationship to functional business knowledge."[4] According to Hayden, large U.S. firms hire few students at entry

level specifically for their foreign language or area studies background. Competence in foreign languages and area studies therefore, is "more of a tool related to a larger and different purpose than an end in itself" (p. 142). Hayden further contends that the link between this field of study and the business world needs to be made on the campuses of American colleges, starting with the business schools. This may be, but teachers of commercial foreign languages can also provide an introduction to functional business knowledge in their classes. These courses should include theoretical materials on the principles of business in the foreign country as well as practical exercises that can improve the students' business knowledge.

This goal may be reached through two assignments which I have used in my commercial French course that are modeled after case studies often required in business courses. These projects serve three functions for commercial French students: first, they increase their awareness of foreign investments a business in the United States as well as American business activities abroad; second, they give students valuable experience in locating information on international corporations, which will be useful to them in finding jobs as well as advantageous once they are employed; and third, they expose students to basic business practices. In both assignments students are required to use reference works available in the business section of most libraries. Among the many documents found there such as annual reports and stock reports, are directories which publish pertinent facts on

multinational corporations. These directories contain a wealth of other useful information related to international commerce. An annotated bibliography of them is included at the end of this article. The assignments requiring the use of these references add a realistic and practical dimension to the commercial French course.

The first assignment is relatively simple and is meant to familiarize the students with the business section of the library and its resources. It is due around the third week of the semester. The assignment is to list five French corporations in the same industry operating in the United States. The complete legal name of the company, its headquarters address, and its products or line of business must be given. Next, the students must list five American companies involved in the same industry that have operations, subsidiaries, or branches in France. For these too, the official name, headquarters address and products must be given. The students then must comment on what they learned from the assignment and express any reactions or observations they have regarding their findings.

The comments I have received about this exercise are positive. Students generally found the exercise stimulating and revealing; one student said she was surprised to see that there are so many French companies in the United States, and another remarked that he was very interested to discover the variety of industries, from cheese production to industrial chemicals, represented--that they were not all French wine and fashion

manufacturers. In fact, the aim of the assignment is to reveal to students the amount of commercial activity currently underway between the two countries and the variety of that activity. It is also meant to show students which industries have the greatest number of corporations operating here, and whether or not their activities are reciprocated by American companies in France.

The second research project should be worked on during the remainder of the semester, that is, from around the fourth through the fifteenth weeks. As in a case study, the students are instructed to track down as much information as possible on a single corporation doing business in France in any industry they choose. If a student prefers, he or she may research a French corporation involved in trade in the United States. Students usually choose an industry in which they have a special interest. Some pick companies in which they would like to work, or in which friends or relatives are working. Others may choose local corporations which they know to be involved in trade with France.

By the end of the fifth or sixth week of the semester, the student must inform the instructor of his choice. In a short consultation, the teacher and the student discuss the choice and how the information will be obtained, for example whether the student plans on writing the company or obtaining the annual report, and so forth. In this way, the instructor can make suggestions, control the choices made among the class as a whole, and assure that students choose publicly-traded companies about

which they are more likely to find information. Once the choice is approved, the student can begin work on the report.

The report must contain details on the company as specified in an outline provided by the instructor. It includes: the history of the corporation (date founded, mergers, etc.), the address of the corporate headquarters, the divisions of the company, the names of its executive officers, its line of business or products, its properties, the value of its stock, names of its subsidiaries, the number of employees, the amount of sales in the previous year, its net worth, and the company's plans for future development. The report must also contain photocopies of the entries on the companies found in more than one source and a statement of what the student learned from the assignment. Copies of the company's annual report or other documents obtained from the company can also be included for extra credit.

Students may encounter a few problems in their research despite the consultation with the instructor concerning the choice of company. For example, if the company is a subsidiary of a larger corporation whose identity is not known, it may not be listed as a separate entity in some directories. Since its parent company is not known, information on the subsidiary may be difficult to find. Additionally, the report should be prepared in narrative form, not simply a copy of the charts, tables, financial balance sheets, and lists of information presented in the references consulted. To avoid this problem, it may be advisable to change the assignment so that the student must make a comparison of

two businesses in the same industry. Comparing a French corporation to an American one might also be interesting, but data on French companies is difficult to obtain unless they are incorporated in the United States. This project has numerous possibilities for expansion and enrichment. Students can be encouraged to request information from their chosen companies in letters conforming to the commercial correspondence format they learned in the course. They may ask for the corporation's Annual Report or its 10-K Report (a detailed disclosure statement required by the Securities and Exchange Commission).

The practical information gained from these assignments is an asset for non-business majors who comprise the bulk of commercial language students. For one thing, these assignments render the terms and concepts they are learning in the class more realistic and relevant. They become thoroughly familiar with many business concepts such as corporate organization, economic sectors, financial worth, and so forth. They also help students to become competent in reading and interpreting business publications such as annual reports and other commercial documents.

In addition to specific data on individual corporations, most directories of multinational corporations contain supplementary articles and tables which are just as valuable to the student as the individual entries on the companies. Their introductions, for example, summarize trends in foreign trade and analyze current policies and developments. One directory has an extensive introductory article outlining the history of

attitudes toward foreign direct investments (FDI) in the United States since World War I, the growth rate of FDI, a summary of the leading industries in FDI, and which nations tend to concentrate in which industries. Another directory concisely defines commonly-used terms and abbreviations such as "parent company," "holding company," "subsidiary," "joint subsidiary," and SIC number (Standard Industrial Classification number).

Other works contain useful glossaries, such as the official abbreviations for company designations used in various countries for example, Ab in Finland; S.A. in Belgium, France, and Switzerland; AG in Austria and Germany, and so forth. Directories such as Foreign Firms Operating in the U.S. give an idea of the amount of business and investing a specific country does in the U.S. The list of Japanese companies doing business here for example, takes up seventy-three pages, while the lists for Great Britain and France are sixty-two and thirty-two pages respectively. The amount of commercial activity by specific countries compared to others can easily be discerned from charts published in the directory of Europe's 10,000 Largest Companies.

An especially rich source, the World Directory of Multinational Enterprises has extensive, detailed introductory chapters and numerous tables of statistics about the multinational enterprises listed. It contains, for example, tables on the distribution of parent companies and their affiliates in both developed and developing countries. Tables on the geographical distribution of direct investment abroad are classified by markets, economic

sector, host country characteristics and other factors. Another series of tables ranks multinationals by size, industry, and geographical origin. The supplementary sections in Principal International Businesses are valuable to business language students since for most countries they list the capital city, population, language, location, monetary unit, and gross domestic product.

The entries in these directories help students identify what information is considered pertinent in the business world. They generally include the legal name of the company; its address and telephone number; telex number; type of business or products; SIC number; the names of the chief executive officer and other top level executives; the divisions of the corporation; the stock market on which its securities are traded; the company's assets, liabilities, and net worth; approximate sales; number of employees; and so forth. The French term for these items is often used (for example "chiffre d'affaires," and "P.D.G.") which helps reinforce the vocabulary being taught in the course. These works are also among the most helpful sources for commercial language students in finding employment. The Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries states, in fact, that it can be used by commercial enterprises, researchers, government agencies, and "seekers of foreign employment."

In conclusion, it is important that commercial French students learn about the principles of doing business in France, but being familiar with directories of international corporations is also advantageous. The following bibliography, which students must use in the two assignments described, is different from the standard bibliography for commercial language classes. Instead

of listing commercial language textbooks, bilingual dictionaries, lexicons of technical terms, books on commercial correspondence, and so forth, this bibliography is restricted to works containing information on currently operating corporations. The sources included are used regularly by business students as well as businessmen and women, and knowing how to use them is a practical skill which increases the foreign language student's effectiveness in the business world. Through these exercises, commercial language courses can contribute to the development of students' business knowledge as well as their language ability.

Annotated Bibliography of Directories of Multinational Corporations

America's Corporate Families. The Billion Dollar Directory. New Jersey: Dun's Marketing Services, 1984.

This work gives the same information as America's Corporate Families and International Affiliates (listed below) but is restricted to U.S. corporations reporting sales of $50 million or more with a net worth of at least $500,000, conducting business from ten or more locations, and having a controlling interest in one or more subsidiaries. It provides data on American ultimate parent companies with a cross reference of subsidiaries of these companies.

America's Corporate Families and International Affiliates. New Jersey: Dun's Marketing Services, 1984.

This directory is the international-level companion to America's Corporate Families. It contains multinational business data with detailed information on U.S. family members of foreign ultimate parent companies as well as foreign subsidiaries of U.S. ultimates. Corporations are listed alphabetically, geographically, and by industry. A user can rapidly identify U.S. multinational parent companies and their foreign subsidiaries in other countries, U.S. subsidiaries of foreign ultimate parents, and all U.S. foreign multinational family members by geographical area or industry.

Angel, Juvenal L. Directory of Foreign Firms Operating in the United States. 4th Edition. New York: World Academy Press, Inc., 1978.

This is a compilation of more than 4,270 American-based enterprises owned wholly or in part by more than 2,700 foreign firms. The first part is arranged alphabetically by countries with the American company (its official name and address) in one column and its foreign parent company (with headquarters address) in the opposite column. The second part is an alphabetical list of the foreign parent companies, and the third part is an alphabetical list of American subsidiaries, branches, or affiliates of foreign companies.

Arpan, Jeffrey S. and Ricks, David A. Directory of foreign Manufacturers in the United States. Second edition. Atlanta: Publishing Services Division, Georgia State University, 1979.

A very useful directory which lists manufacturers in alphabetical order according to company name, this work provides parent company information, product information, and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) number. The "Exhibits" at the beginning of the directory provide information such as parent countries ranked by number of foreign-owned U.S. manufacturers, state location of foreign-owned U.S. manufacturers, and industrial classifications ranked by number of foreign-owned U.S. manufacturers. Several indexes at the end of the

volume list U.S. companies by state location, parent companies, parent companies by country, and products by Standard Industrial Classification.

Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries. 10th edition. 3 Vols. New York: Uniworld Business Publications, Inc., 1984.

This directory is an alphabetical index of American firms which have operations overseas. Each entry contains the company's United States address and telephone number, the name of its president, its product or service, the number of employees, and the foreign countries in which it operates. Volumes II and III contain listings by country of the American firms' foreign operations.

Directory of Corporate Affiliations, 1984. "Who Owns Whom." Wilmette, Illinois: National Register Publishing Company, Inc., 1984.

Contains companies listed on the New York and American Stock exchanges, the Fortune 1,000 and those whose stock is traded over the counter or is privately owned. The first section lists parent companies in alphabetical order, and provides the address, phone number, ticker symbol, stock exchange, approximate sales, number of employees, type of business and top officers of the corporation. It also lists the company's divisions, subsidiaries, and affiliates with the addresses, types of business, and so forth. The second section is a

geographical index listing all the companies in the directory by state and city, and the last section is an index by SIC numbers, enumerating all the companies in the directory by their primary type of business.

Europe's 10,000 Largest Companies. London and New York: Dun and Bradstreet International, 1983.

This is a tri-lingual publication serving as a quick source of financial and statistical information for sixteen countries of Western Europe and Scandanavia. In table format, each chapter is devoted to the industrial rankings of Europe's largest companies. The first chapter lists the 8,500 largest industrials ranked according to sales and provides such information as the total volume of export sales, the number of employees, the number of shareholders, balance sheet information, the location of the company's headquarters, and the industrial activity code number. Other chapters rank the 500 largest industrials by profit, the 250 most profitable industrials, the 2,500 largest trading companies, the 350 largest transport companies, the 350 largest banks, etc.

Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce International Trade and Commerce Directory, 1983-1983.

A useful manual that contains an alphabetical list of Fort Worth companies involved in international commerce. Similar publications are available in other cities. This one provides the addresses, phone numbers, and SIC numbers of the

businesses and also indicates to whom the company exports or from whom it imports, where it has subsidiaries, and if it has licensing agreements.

Jablonski, Donna M., editor. How to Find Information About Companies. Washington, D.C.: Washington Researchers, 1979.

This work lists sources of information about public and private companies in federal, state, and local government as well as in the private sector. Government agencies, offices as well as investigators and information services are listed. One chapter is entitled "Sources of Information About Foreign Firms."

Million Dollar Directory. 3 Vols. New Jersey: Dun's Marketing Services, 1984.

Contains the same type of information as The Billion Dollar Directory (see above) but corporations are grouped according to net worth of between $500,000 and more than $1,670,000

Moody's International Manual. 1983 New York: Moody's Investors Service, Inc., 1983.

An excellent source of financial and business information on more than 3,000 major corporations and national and supranational institutions in 100 countries. Corporate information contained includes: company history, description of business and property, financial statements, names of manage-

ment, debt, capital and other key data. The center section (blue pages) contains a geographical index to the manual, a classification of companies by industries and products, and much more financial index information.

Moody's International News Reports.

These are biweekly supplements to the Moody's International Manual. Most issues contain notices of securities offered by various companies, new company descriptions, a news section in which the companies are listed by country, and information on world corporations.

Principal International Businesses 1984. New York: Dun and Bradstreet International, Ltd., 1983.

This work, which is revised and published annually, provides information on 50,000 business enterprises in 133 countries. Each listing includes the DUNS number, an import-export indicator, the official name of the business, its parent company, its address, telex number, sales volume, the total number of employees, the SIC number, the chief executive officer's name, and the line of business of the company. A multi-lingual publication, its table of contents and introduction are in English, French, Spanish, and German.

The World Directory of Multinational Enterprises. 2 Vols. Edited by John M. Stopford, John H. Dunning, and Klaus O. Haberich. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1980.

This is an excellent reference which gives profiles

of 430 major multinational corporations, arranged by company names in alphabetical order. Each entry gives the company's type of business, its address, company structure, products, sales figures, a five year summary financial statement, background information, the company's current situation, its major shareholders, and principal subsidiaries.

1981 Yearbook of International Trade Statistics. 2 Vols. New York: United Nations, 1982.

A bilingual work (French and English) which provides information on individual countries' external trade performance in terms of overall trends, volume and price and importance of trading partners. It includes numerous tables showing the contributions of each country to trade in its region and in the world, analyzing the flow of trade between countries. Tables are, for example, world trade by region, country, or area; world trade by commodity classes and regions; exports of market economies, and so forth. Notes on individual countries at the beginning of the tables give pertinent historical information on imports and exports, changes in currency and other relevant facts.

NOTES

[1] Some of these reports are: June K. Phillips, ed., New Cases for Foreign Language Study (Middlebury, Vermont: Northeast Conference on the Training of Foreign Languages, Inc., 1981); The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (Hastings-on-Hudson, New York: rpt. American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language, 1983); Richard I. Brod, Language Study for the 1980s (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1980).

[2] Connie Lauermann, "Fear of Languages Costly: Is U.S. Getting Lost in the Translation?" Chicago Tribune, 25 August 1981, Section 2, pp. 1-3.

[3] Ray Schaub, "Language Training for International Business at Eastern Michigan University," American Departments of Foreign Languages Bulletin, Vol. 14, No. 3 (March 1983), 51.

[4] The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 449, May 1980, 141.